


STI BULLETIN

A publication for users of the NASA scientific and technical information program

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RECONplus Interfaces Enter New Test Phases

In the halls of CASI it is not enough to talk about the RECONplus interface: you have to ask which interface are you talking about. Currently, the CASI development staff and volunteer testers are testing both the Character-Based and Graphical User Interfaces to RECONplus, the system scheduled to replace the RECON text retrieval system in early 1996. Multiple interfaces are provided to allow the user to choose the access method with which he or she is most comfortable.

The Character-Based Interface (CBI) allows access to the RECONplus database by any computer or terminal with VT100 emulation and telnet access. While CASI recommends 486 or equivalent processors, this server-based system can be accessed from a 3270 terminal as well as from a UNIX workstation. The most common modes of access in the alpha and beta testing have been PCs with 486 processors and PowerMacs. The interface is a DOS menu system that uses control key combinations and keys common to all keyboards.

The CBI is based on an interface developed by the Department of Energy's Office of Scientific and Technical Information for remote access to its Energy Database. This system was extended by both CASI designers and the developers at Technology Concepts and Design, Inc. to meet the requirements of the NASA community, both end users and professional searchers. The CBI has three access modes. The first is the Quick Search Mode that allows access to the four most commonly searched fields: the author, topic/subject words or phrases, numbers (including report numbers), and publication date. Using this screen, a searcher can quickly enter terms into one or more of these fields and get very specific results. The second search mode is the Full Search Mode; it provides access in a guided fashion to all 60+ indexes available in the RECONplus system. It allows searches to be narrowed and combined. Finally, the Command Line search allows

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advanced searchers to key the commands directly onto a command line. Using a straightforward syntax of the index code and search term (or terms) connected by a Boolean operator, the user can do rather complex searching. All three modes allow the searcher to build a search by selecting search terms from expanded displays of the indexes, reducing the need for typing. Post-search functions such as review, print, download, store, and retrieve searches and results are handled by shared functions available to all three modes through the tool bar or the control key combinations. The CBI was beta tested by over 150 participants, including professional searchers, scientists, engineers, and library school students. Beta testing is scheduled for completion in October.

The Graphical User Interface (GUI) under Windows takes advantage of all the benefits of a Windows interface—drop-down boxes; point, click and drag navigation; full use of the clipboard; mouse navigation with keyboard equivalents where possible; and the comfort of a Windows environment. The GUI will also have Quick Search, Guided Search and Command Line modes, and post-processing functions equivalent to those in the CBI. In addition, it has the advantage of field-specific help through the Windows Help function.


The RECONplus GUI is currently being alpha tested by participants from the NASA center libraries and several additional end users.

The alpha testing is progressing in a phased approach with new functions being added each week, along with the appropriate documentation. The phased release provides the developer with more immediate feedback from the testers. The GUI testing will continue through the fall.

Access to NASA data has been improved by increasing the number of access points (indexes) over the current RECON system. There are 62 indexes in the RECONplus database structure, each of which can be searched, sorted, and displayed. The most notable additions are the language, document type, publication date, and NASA subject category indexes. Some fields, such as organization source, financial sponsor, and journal title, are indexed both as word and phrased indexes. The phrased index allows the user to select the full phrased term from a display of the index for the field. The word index allows the user to search the same field using Boolean operators and adjacency. High-level indexes provide access to multiple fields with the same search. For example, the basic index encompasses the title, abstract, control terms, and subject category fields. These fields are also indexed in their own specific indexes. The number index provides access to all the numbers connected to a document, such as the report number or contract number.

In addition to the interfaces, the testers are reviewing the documentation, training, and database structure of the RECONplus system. Significant effort has been put into

the design of the display/print formats. Multiple formats are available, as well as the ability under the CBI to develop, store and reuse a user-selected format.

The NASA Center for AeroSpace Information would like to thank the testers who have contributed so many hours to the improvement of a system that will benefit the entire NASA community. We owe them all our thanks for a job well done! 

New Books at CASI

X-Ray and Gamma-Ray Astronomy Detectors, NASA SP-517, by Rudolf Decher, Brian D. Ramsey, and Robert Austin

Aimed at scientists, engineers and technical personnel, this introduction to x-ray and gamma-ray astronomy instruments provides an overview of detector design and technology. The discussion is limited to basic principles and design concepts and provides examples of applications in past, present and future space missions.

Vertical Flight Training, NASA RP-1373, Edited by William E. Larsen, Robert J. Randle, Jr. and Lloyd N. Popish

A broad overview is given of the technology that is relevant to the

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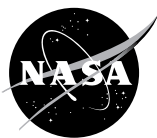
design of aviation training systems and the techniques applicable to the development, use, and evaluation of those systems.

Readings in Program Control, NASA SP-6103, Edited by Francis T. Hoban, William M. Lawbaugh

This book is aimed at the next generation of project managers. As part of the corporate memory of the NASA Program and Project Management Initiative, this volume collects, preserves and transmits the lessons learned on program control for better management of the future. 

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